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A LETTER OF THE Presbyterian Miniſters In the CITY of LONDON,

Preſented the Firſt of *Jan.* 1645. to the Reverend Aſſembly of

DIVINES,

Sitting at *Weſtminſter*, by Authority of *Parliament*, AGAINST

TOLERATION.

Now Re-printed, with ſome Animadverſions thereon.

LONDON,
Printed for *J. Johnſon*, 1668.

A Preface to the Reader.

IT is sufficiently known, how the *Presbyterian Party*, in this Nation, having by the help of the *Covenant*, and *force of Armes*, rooted out (as they thought) *Episcopal* or *Prelatical* Government, Established by the Known Laws of the Land, soon found themselves supplanted *in their new intended Uniformity* (pressed on all men with a most *zealous Rigour*) by their younger Brother, *Independency*: which under the smooth pretensions of *Liberty of Conscience*, and *Toleration*, threatned *Presbytery* with the same destruction. Hereupon the Presbyterian Ministers of *London*, meeting at *Sion Colledge*, drew up this ensuing Letter to the Assembly, convened at *Westminster*, to possess them with the unlawfulness of Liberty *of Conscience and Toleration*; especially *aiming at Independency*, their feared Rival. But the Intelligent Reader will easily discern how their own Arguments recoil upon themselves. How dangerous and wicked it is in their Judge-

ment to Tolerate, (much more to perpetuate by a ſtanding Law) Schiſm in the Church; whether of Presbytery, or Independency, of which they are ſo *equally guilty*, that it will be very difficult, if not impoſſible, for an impartial underſtanding, to condemn the one, and to acquit the other: Yea, it will appear by their *own Reaſons here alledged*, how neceſſary it is to the preſervation of Truth and Peace, that an *Uniform Obedience* be yielded to one and the ſame eſtabliſhed Rule of *Eccleſiaſtical Polity*, leſt otherwiſe the *people* be *ſeduced* and *drawn away from our* Congregations; the Godly, Painful, Orthodox, and *Conformable Clergy* be diſcouraged; all ſorts of *Sectaries emboldened* to deſire, and endeavour the like *Indulgence*; the Civil State, by endleſs Diviſions, weakened; and the Church firſt diſtracted, and at laſt deſtroyed. *The God of Peace and Truth grant us a right underſtanding in all things.* Amen.

To our Reverend, Learned, and Religious Brethren, the Prolocutor, and the reſt of the Divines Aſſembled, and now ſitting at Weſtminſter, *by Authority of Parliament: Theſe preſent.*

Reverend and Beloved Brethren,

WE are exceedingly apprehenſive of the deſireableneſs of our Churches Peace, and of the pleaſantneſs of Brethrens Unity, knowing that when Peace is ſet upon its proper Baſis, *viz.* Righteouſneſs and Truth, it is one of the beſt poſſeſſions, both delectable and profitable; like *Aarons* Ointment, and the dew of *Hermon*. It is true, by reaſon of different lights, and different ſights among Brethren, there may be diſſenting in Opinion; yet, (a) *Why ſhould there be any ſeparating from Church-Communion?* The Churches Coat may be of divers colours, yet, Why ſhould there be any rent in it? Have we not a touch-ſtone of Truth, the good Word of God; and when all things are examined by that Word, then

(a) What is the keeping Conventicles, or private Meetings, but ſeparating from our Church-Communion.

then that which is best may be held fast; but first they must be known, and then examined afterward. If our dissenting Brethren after so many importunate intreaties, would have been perswaded (either in zeal to the Truth, or in sincere love to the Churches peace and unity among Brethren, or in respect to their own reputation by fair and ingenuous dealing, or (*b*) *in conscience to their promise made with the Ministers of* London, *now five years since*, or any such like reasonable consideration) at last to have given us a full Narrative of their Opinions, and Grounds of their Separation, we are perswaded they would not have stood at such a distance from us, as now they do: But they chose rather to walk by their own private lights, than to unbosome themselves to us their most affectionate Brethren; and to set themselves in an untrodden way of their own, rather than to wait what our Covenanted Reformation, according to the Word of God, and (*c*) *examples of the Best Reformed Churches*, would bring forth. But the offence doth not end here, it is much that our Brethren should separate from the Church, but that they should endeavour (*d*) *to get a Warrant to authorize their Separation from it, and to have liberty (by drawing Members out of it) to weaken and diminish it, till (so far as lies in them) they have brought it to nothing; this we think to be plainly unlawful;*

(*b*) Yet the Ministers of this perswasion made as little Conscience of their Subscriptions, Promises, yea, Oaths of Canonical Obedience to their respective Diocesans.

(*c*) Shew us the example of one Reformed Church, which alloweth her Ministers Liberty not to use her Established Rites and Ceremonies.

(*d*) This is plainly our Brethrens Design and Endeavour at this time.

yet

yet this we understand is their present design and endeavour. Wherefore (Reverend Brethren) having had such large experience of your zeal of Gods glory, your care of his afflicted Church, your earnest endeavours to promote the compleat Reformation of it, and of your ready concurrence with us in the improvement of any means that might be found conducible to this end; we are bold to hint unto you these our ensuing Reasons against the Toleration of Independency in this Church.

1. The desires and endeavours of *Independents* for a Toleration, are at this time extreamly unseasonable and præproperous: for,

1. The Reformation of Religion is not yet perfected and setled among us, according to our Covenant. And why may not the Reformation be raised up at last to such purity and perfection, that truly tender Consciences may receive abundant satisfaction for ought that yet appears?

2. It is not yet known what the Government of the *Independents* is, neither would they ever yet vouchsafe to let the world know what they hold in that point, though some of their party have been too forward to challenge the *London* Petitioners as *led with blind obedience, and pinning their souls upon the Priests sleeve*, for desiring an establishment of the Government of Christ, before there was any model of it extant.

3. We

3. We can ~~han~~ hardly be perſwaded, that the *Independents* themſelves (after all the ſtirres they have made amongſt us) (*e*) *are as yet fully reſolved about their own way wherewith they would be concluded*, ſeeing they publiſh not their model (though they are nimble enough in publiſhing other things) and they profeſs Reſerves, and new Lights, for which they will (no doubt) expect the like Toleration, and ſo *in infinitum*. It were more ſeaſonable to move for Toleration when once *they are poſitively determined how farr they mean to go, and where they mean to ſtay*.

(*e*) The *Presbyterians* (although often preſſed thereunto) will not declare wherewith they would be all concluded, how farr they mean to go and where to ſtay in their deſires of Toleration or Condeſcention.

II. Their deſires and endeavours are unreaſonable and unequal in divers regards.

1. Partly becauſe no ſuch Toleration hath hitherto been eſtabliſhed (ſo far as we know) in any Chriſtian State by the Civil Magiſtrate.

2. (*f*) *Partly becauſe ſome of them have ſolemnly profeſt, that they cannot ſuffer Presbytery; and anſwerable hereunto, is their practice in thoſe places where Independency prevails.*

(*f*) It's notorious, *Presbytery* would not in the late times Tolerate *Epiſcopacy*.

3. And partly becauſe (*g*) *to grant to them and not to other Sectaries who are free born as well as they, and have done as good ſervice as they to the publick* (as they uſe to plead) *will be counted injuſtice and great partiality*; but to grant it unto all, will ſcarce be cleared from great impiety.

(*g*) To grant Indulgence unto a few, would offend many more of all parties. Why may not *Independents*, and all other Sectaries, deſire the ſame favour in caſe they provide Readers or Curates.

III. *In-*

III. *Independency is a Schism*, for,

1. (*b*) Independents *do depart from our Churches, being true Churches, and so acknowledged by themselves.*

2. *They draw and seduce our Members from our Congregations.*

(*b*) Ye already do, and (in case your Toleration be granted) will draw our Members from our Congregations, which ye acknowledge true Churches.

3. (*i*) *They erect separate Congregations under a separate and undiscovered Government.*

4. (*k*) *They refuse Communion with our Churches in the Sacraments.*

(*i*) Ye do in effect set up separate Churches.

(*k*) Ye receive not the Sacrament (except some few) in our Churches, but at private Meetings.

5. Their Ministers refuse to preach among us as Officers.

6. Their Members, if at any time they joyn with us in hearing the Word and Prayer, yet they do it not as with the Ministerial Word and Prayer, nor as acts of Church-Communion.

(*l*) *Now we judge that no Schism is to be Tolerated in* the Church, * σχίσματα, 1 *Cor.* 1. 10. 1 *Cor.* 12. 25. † διχοστασίαι, *Rom.* 6. 17. with 1 *Cor.* 3. 3. *Gal.* 5. 20.

(*l*) No Schism is to be Tolerated, as ye grant. But Presbytery is a Schism *now*, as much as Independency was by you declared to be *then*: Wherefore, according to your own grounds, it is not to be Tolerated.

* *Schisms.* † *Divisions.*

(m) Should Presbytery be Tolerated, it would produce all the very same evils in Church and State, you affirm Independency (if Tolerated) would have done; and the same reasons strongly prove, that as Independency was not, so Presbytery is not to be Tolerated.

IV. (m) Many mischiefs will inevitably follow upon this Toleration, and that both to Church and Common-wealth.

First, to the Church, as,

1. *Causeless and unjust revolts from our Ministry and Congregations.*

2. *Our peoples mindes will be troubled, and in danger to be subverted, as* Acts 15. 24.

3. *Bitter heart-burnings among Brethren will be fomented and perpetuated to posterity.*

4. *The Godly, Painful, and Orthodox Ministry will be discouraged, and despised.*

5. *The life and power of godliness will be eaten out by frivolous Disputes, and vain Janglings.*

6. *The whole course of Religion in private Families will be interrupted, and undermined.*

7. *Reciprocal Duties between persons of neerest and dearest Relations, will be extreamly violated.*

8. *The whole work of Reformation, especially in Discipline and Government will be retarded, disturbed, and in danger of being made utterly frustrate and void, whilst every person shall have liberty upon every trivial discontent at Pres-*

Presbyterial Government and Churches, to revolt from us, and list themselves in separated Congregations.

9. *All other Sects and Heresies in the Kingdom will be encouraged to endeavour the like Toleration.*

10. *All other Sects and Heresies in the Kingdom will safeguard and shelter themselves under the wings of* Independency, *and some of the* Independents *in their Books have openly avowed, that they plead for Liberty of Conscience as well for others, as for themselves,*

11. *And the whole Church of* England *in short time will be swallowed up with distraction and confusion. And* God is not *the Author* of confusion, but of peace, 1 *Corinth.* 14. 33.

Secondly, To the Common-wealth. For,

1. *All these mischiefs in the Church will have their proportionable influence upon the Common-wealth.*

2. *The Kingdome will be wofully weakened by Scandals and Divisions, so that the enemies of it, both Domestical and Forreign, will be encouraged to plot and practice against it.*

3. *It is much to be doubted, lest the Power of the Magistrate, should not only be weakened, but even utterly overthrown, considering the principles and practices of* Independents, *together with their compliance with other Sectaries, sufficiently known to be Anti-Magistratical.*

V. Such a Toleration is utterly repugnant and inconſiſtent with that Solemn League and Covenant, for Reformation and Defence of Religion, which not only both Houſes of Parliament, but alſo perſons of all ſorts in both Kingdomes of *England* and *Scotland*, have ſubſcribed, and with hands lifted up to the moſt High God, have ſworn: Which Covenant likewiſe, both you, and we, and thoſe that moſt earneſtly purſue the eſtabliſhment of this Toleration, have made, (or ſhould have made) *in the preſence of Almighty God, the ſearcher of all hearts, with a true intention to perform the ſame, as we ſhall anſwer at that great day, when the ſecrets of all hearts ſhall be diſcloſed.* For,

1. *This is oppoſite to the Reformation of Religion, according to the Word of God, and the example of the beſt Reformed Churches,* Article 1.

2. (*n*) It is deſtructive to the *three Kingdoms neareſt conjunction and uniformity in Religion and Government, which might lead us and our Poſterity after us as Brethren to live in Faith and Love.* Art. 1.

(*n*) The Toleration of Presbytery is no leſs deſtructive to the Conjunction and Uniformity of all the three Kingdoms, then Independency.

3. *It*

3. (o) *It is plainly contrary to that extirpation of Schism, and whatsoever shall be found contrary to sound Doctrine, and the power of Godliness, which we have sworn sincerely, really, and constantly to endeavour without respect of persons.* Art. 2.

(o) Seeing Presbytery is as much *Schism* from *Episcopacy*, as Episcopacy or Independency was from Presbytery, why do ye now, instead of extirpation, desire the Toleration of it, contrary to your *Covenant*?

4. (p) *Hereby we shall be involved in the guilt of other mens sins, and thereby be endangered to receive of their plagues.* Art 2.

(p) Toleration of *Schism* rendereth Magistrates and Ministers accessary to the Errors, Sins, and Destruction of Seduced and Deluded people.

5. It seems utterly impossible (if such a Toleration should be granted) that the *Lord should be one, and his name one in the three Kingdoms.* Art. 2.

6. *This will palpably hinder the Reformation of Religion, inevitably divide one Kingdome from another, and unhappily make Factions and Parties among the people, contrary to this League and Covenant*; of which evil Offices, whosoever shall be found guilty, are reputed in the words of the Covenant, (q) *Incendiaries, Malignants, or evil Instruments, to be discovered, that they may be brought to publick tryal, and receive condigne punishment*, Art. 4. and 5.

(q) The Toleration of deformity, even in little matters, sometimes causeth Factions and Parties amongst the people. Let us have a care we be not *Incendiaries, or evil Instruments* for *Sacrilegious Spirits* to work by, ill-affected as well to *Presbytery* as *Episcopacy*.

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These are some of the many considerations which make deep impression upon our Spirits against that great *Diana* of *Independents*, and all the Sectaries so much cryed up by them in these distracted times, *viz. A Toleration, a Toleration.* And however, none should have more rejoyced then our selves in the establishment of a Brotherly, Peaceable, and Christian Accommodation: yet this being utterly rejected by them, we cannot dissemble how upon the fore-mentioned grounds, we detest and abhor the much endeavoured Toleration, Our bowels, our bowels, are stirred within us, and we could even drown our selves in tears, when we call to minde how long and sharp a travel this Kingdom hath been in for many years together, to bring forth that blessed fruit of a pure and perfect Reformation; and now at last after all our pangs and dolors, and expectations, this real and through Reformation, is in danger of being strangled in the Birth by a lawless Toleration, that strives to be brought forth before it.

Wherefore (Reverend and Beloved Brethren) we could not satisfie our selves till we had made some discovery of our thoughts unto you about this matter; not that we can harbour the least jealousie of your zeal, fidelity, or industry in the opposing and extirpating of such a root of gall and bitterness as Toleration is and will be, both in present and future Ages; but that we may what lies in us endeavour mutu-

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ally to ſtrengthen one anothers reſolutions againſt the preſent growing evils, and that our conſciences may not ſmite us another day for ſinful ſilence, or ſluggiſh deficiency in any point of duty tending to the Glory of Chriſt, Honour of the Truth, Peace of the Church, Perfection of Reformation, Performance of our Covenant, and Benefit of preſent and ſucceeding Generations.

From Sion Colledge, *London, Decemb.* 18. 1645.

Subſcribed by us your affectionate Brethren and Fellow-Labourers in the work of the Miniſtery, to whom truth and peace is very precious.

FINIS.